

I'll Cover You by **Luddleston**

Category: Compilation of Final Fantasy VII

Genre: 5+1 Things, Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, First Kiss, First Time, Getting Together, Hand Jobs, M/M, Oral Sex, Pining, Sharing a Bed, oh my god they were roommates

Language: English

Characters: Cloud Strife, Zack Fair

Relationships: Zack Fair/Cloud Strife

Status: Completed

Published: 2020-06-12

Updated: 2020-06-12

Packaged: 2022-12-19 11:04:50

Rating: Explicit

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 7,766

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

There are things in this world that Cloud just can't deal with. Such as: Zack's inexplicable decision that Cloud's bed would be a great place to take a nap.

(Five times Zack got into Cloud's bed without asking, and one time Cloud got into Zack's)

I'll Cover You

Author's Note:

This entire fic happened because I was listening to mbmbam and there was a question about someone's roommate taking a nap in their bed because they'd broken up with their partner recently and wanted some human contact.

And then I thought, "hey. That's a thing Zack would do."

I've been writing this for WEEKS, but I just now finally got the energy to edit it and write the final scene!

— 1 —

"I gotta say, man, I really don't have much advice for you."

Cloud sighed, frowning in the direction of his bed. More specifically, the Zack-shaped lump hogging all the covers. "Yeah. It's sort of... I should just wake him up, right?"

What he *should* have done was avoid the problem in the first place. Zack was a hard person to say no to, even when he wasn't making the sad puppy eyes, so, when he'd come to Cloud with his whole *hey, do you mind if I nap on your bed while you work on stuff or whatever, I just need some human contact, you know?* Cloud had made the mistake of saying, "sure, whatever." Now, it was nearing eight and Zack was still curled up on his bed, his face smashed into one of Cloud's pillows.

"I mean... probably?" Biggs's sigh crackled a little through Cloud's half-functional headphones. *"Why did you even call me about this? I mean, not that I don't want you to call, it's just—"*

Cloud knew what it was. He wasn't the kind of person to ask for advice, and he *really* wasn't the kind of person to make a phone call unless he

desperately had to. "Well. Tifa and Barret would judge me and Wedge and Jessie would tell everyone. Figured you were a safe bet."

He could practically hear Biggs shrugging. *"Just tell him he's gonna screw up his sleep schedule. You're doing him a favor, making sure that doesn't happen."*

"Yeah... it's just... he said the whole thing about human contact, and I. I dunno."

"It's been what, a month?" Biggs asked.

"I think? I'm not actually sure when they broke up, it wasn't an *event* or anything." Cloud stepped out his bedroom door so that he could pace around the living room without waking Zack up. Not that he was too concerned, Zack slept like the dead and needed an alarm clock loud enough to rival the smoke detector to get him up in the mornings. "I didn't think he was too upset about it," he finally said.

"I don't think he is," Biggs said. *"It's more the 'not being in a relationship' thing than 'she broke my heart'."*

Cloud was quiet long enough that Biggs must've realized he didn't quite get that.

"I mean, you know Zack. He's always dating somebody, and if he's not, he's trying to. He likes being with somebody."

"I guess?" He'd been living with Zack for what, the better part of a year? Cloud tried not to pay too much attention to Zack's love life, but he was pretty sure this was the longest Zack had been single in a while.

"At the very least, he likes cuddling with somebody."

"You'd better not be talking about that one time—I was drunk, you can't—"

"I can—"

"We wouldn't even be talking about this if Jessie didn't take so many goddamn pictures."

"—and I will."

"I'm going to hang up on you," Cloud threatened. Wouldn't have been the first time, either.

"Just wake him up and kick him out of your bed, man," Biggs said. "That's what I'd do if Wedge or Jessie were taking a nap in my room."

It may have seemed like a valid comparison, but it wasn't quite accurate. "Yeah. I guess."

"You gonna hang up on me now? Should I say 'bye just to preempt that?"

See, Biggs didn't quite have the added complications that made Cloud wish he didn't have to kick Zack out of his bed. "Probably."

"Alright, talk to you later."

"Yeah. 'Bye. Thanks."

He hung up the phone and stared back at the door to his bedroom for a long time.

The issue wasn't that Zack had decided to flop onto Cloud's bed, pull a blanket over his head, and pass out. The issue was that, despite having been Zack's friend for five years, and despite having lived with him long enough to see all the worst sides of him, Cloud still found him ridiculously attractive.

Cloud walked as quietly and slowly to his bed as he could, pausing to close the blinds on the way, aimlessly moving around some of the clutter on his dresser just to give himself something to do. Biggs was right. He had to wake Zack up, but that also meant he'd have to acknowledge the whole situation, and Cloud was well-practiced in not acknowledging anything uncomfortable.

He finally turned around, only to find Zack looking at him, eyes half-closed and sleepy, his hair flattened where it wasn't smashed against Cloud's pillow. He'd managed to sprawl into the space Cloud had been occupying before he left the room to keep himself from throwing his laptop through the window because he couldn't focus on anything that wasn't Zack's slow, steady breathing.

"Oh. Hey," Cloud said. "I was gonna wake you up."

"Rude." Zack buried his face in Cloud's pillow again, muffled when he added, "I'm still asleep."

"No you aren't." Cloud searched around for the other pillow to throw it at Zack's head.

"No, I'm not," Zack agreed, sitting up and ruffling his hair into an equally messy but slightly different arrangement. "What time's it?"

He could've picked up his phone and checked, but he liked to ask Cloud instead. He also liked to ask Cloud what the weather was like every time he went outside, and then often forewent Cloud's response and didn't wear a jacket anyway.

"It's eight," Cloud said, even though it must've been almost quarter past now, considering how long he'd been pacing around and talking to Biggs.

Zack yawned and rubbed at his jaw, then the corners of his eyes. "I was out for a while, huh?"

"I guess. I wasn't paying attention," Cloud lied. Zack had been asleep for exactly two hours and fifteen minutes when Cloud left the room to call Biggs for advice.

"Mmkay. What were you watching?" He nodded at Cloud's laptop, which was sitting open on the floor near the bed where Cloud had set it in his panic.

"Nothing, really," he said. That one wasn't a lie. He'd been spending way too long looking through Netflix and hadn't managed to find something suitably distracting.

Zack flicked the lamp on Cloud's bedside table on like he did it every morning. In the light, Cloud could see faint red lines where the pillowcase had pressed into Zack's cheek.

He didn't see Zack like this often. Zack was a heavy sleeper but also a morning person somehow, and with Cloud on second shift lately, he didn't see Zack in the mornings at all. Even when he was on first shift, he only saw Zack for a second, usually on his way out of the shower after his morning run and before heading to class.

Morning. Run. How was Cloud attracted to somebody who did this kind of shit?

He chanced another look at Zack and found him still a little sleepy-eyed, stretching his arms behind his head. Cloud watched the way Zack's shoulderblades flexed under his T-shirt for a little too long. Maybe it was a good thing he never saw Zack in the mornings.

"Hey, you wanna get something to eat?" Zack asked, like they were sitting in the living room and he'd just chucked a throw pillow at Cloud to get his attention. Not like he was sitting with Cloud's bedsheets tangled around his thighs.

"Sure, yeah," Cloud said, and headed for the kitchen, because he wasn't sure how much more of this he could take.

— 2 —

Zack seemed to take what Cloud had been hoping was a one-time anomaly as a general invitation to get into Cloud's bed whenever, including when Cloud was half-asleep.

On a Saturday.

He'd been known to sleep in well past noon on weekends, even later when he was living with a roommate who didn't feel a pressing need to wake him up at some point. He only managed to wake up before three because Zack liked to sing while he was making lunch. Loudly.

Cloud didn't ever mind; he needed to get up, and listening to Zack belting out half-remembered lyrics was pretty entertaining. Sometimes, when they actually had plans, Zack would stick his head through Cloud's door and start saying his name until he got some kind of acknowledgment, usually grumbling or a rude gesture in his direction.

Today, though, Zack had elected to flop straight onto Cloud's bed next to him, startling Cloud awake faster and more effectively than anything else Zack had ever done.

"You need to see this," Zack said, pointing his phone screen in Cloud's direction, having clearly forgotten that Cloud couldn't see shit at that distance until he put his contacts in.

"What the fuck." That was about all he could get out of his mouth. It was a lot of words, considering he still wasn't fully awake and was, according to several people, chronically monosyllabic.

"Look!" Zack insistently showed Cloud something on his phone.

"If this is a meme, I swear to god." Cloud reached over Zack to snatch his glasses off the bedside table, then considered the phone again.

"It's gay penguins!"

"...What?"

It was, indeed, an article from some zoo about a pair of male penguins who were the penguin equivalent of a couple. It was cute, probably. Cloud had a low threshold for what was cute when he'd just woken up.

"I always forget you wear glasses," Zack said, as Cloud handed the phone back to him without doing much aside from skimming the article. He tapped

the corner of Cloud's frames, which nudged them just barely out of place. "You should wear them more often, they look good."

He didn't say anything, hoping his face wasn't betraying the fact that he really couldn't handle Zack laying in his bed, telling him he looked good.

"You want something for breakfast? I'm making lunch, but, y'know." Zack was very much not making lunch. He was laying on his stomach on Cloud's bed, propped up on his elbows and, from the looks of things, sending that penguin article to about five people. Half his hair was pulled up into a messy ponytail, which probably meant he had been cooking before he burst into Cloud's room with breaking news.

"I'm good. Go make sure nothing's burning, or whatever." Cloud rested his chin on his folded arms and closed his eyes, so that he didn't have to look at Zack being attractive.

Zack laughed, loud and bright. "I'm making a salad, no worries. Unless the tomatoes spontaneously combust, we're good." He nudged Cloud in the shoulder, his fingertips lingering on Cloud's bicep. "Hey! Don't go back to sleep."

"M not."

"You "are," Zack insisted. "Cloud! I'm going to tickle you if you don't get up."

"Go ahead. I'm not ticklish."

"Okay, I know that's a lie." Zack reached under the covers for the back of Cloud's knee. Either Zack was a surprisingly good guesser, or Tifa had betrayed him. Cloud rolled over before Zack could touch him, batting his arm out of the way, which only encouraged Zack to wrestle him into the mattress.

For a moment, they were a flurry of limbs, and it was a wonder nobody got a tooth knocked out or an inadvertent kick in the balls. A surge of irritation rushed through Cloud when he continued to struggle but realized Zack had

him pinned good, his knee on Cloud's thigh, hands grasping Cloud's wrists and keeping them firmly planted on the pillow over Cloud's head. The irritation was followed by blinding, awful arousal, a combination of the way Zack bit his lip but didn't quite manage to hide the triumphant grin on his face and the way his shirt had ridden up in the struggle.

Cloud was breathing too hard, his glasses askew, and this had to end. Now. Before Zack shifted and realized Cloud was half-hard over some light manhandling. "Get off, you asshole," he hissed, shoving at Zack again and managing to escape only because he'd caught Zack off guard.

"Probably shouldn't've tackled you right after waking you up, huh," Zack observed. He was still kneeling on Cloud's bed, though, and he leaned over to nudge Cloud's glasses back into place. "Seriously, though, get up, I'll make you something to eat, yeah?"

"Sure. Lemme get up and put my contacts in and stuff." He frowned in the direction of his closet, not looking forward to searching through it for something to wear. He needed to do laundry.

"Nah, leave 'em. The glasses are nice, man."

"Fuck off," Cloud said, and shoved past him to the bathroom to put his contacts in anyway.

— 3 —

"Cloud? Why are you in my bed?"

"You dumbass. This is my bed."

"Uh, pretty sure it's mine. It's cool if you wanna share, though."

"Zack, you're drunk, go to your room."

Zack continued to roll around in the blankets—Cloud's blankets—wiggling until he was almost dead-center in the bed. He was mind-bogglingly drunk, but that was just what happened when Aerith convinced them to go to a club and Zack took the opportunity to wear that one transparent mesh T-

shirt he owned for god-knows-why and people bought drinks for him left and right. Cloud would've been jealous if he hadn't been busy drinking a little too fast so he could ignore the shadow of Zack's abs in that shirt (not to mention the way his ass looked in those jeans).

He sighed, now entirely sure that he wasn't going to get Zack out of his bed unless he wanted to bodily lift him. And that'd take a while, because Cloud was a little too drunk for lifting a whole entire Zack.

"Alright. Fine. Are you going to throw up in my bed? Because I will kick you out immediately if there's even a chance that'll happen."

"First of all, no. Second of all, it's my bed, Cloudy, get it straight."

"I don't get anything straight, ever." Cloud may not have had it in him to pick Zack up, but he could shove him over a couple inches.

"Hell yeah, bi rights!"

Ah. Back to flailing.

"Zack, calm down, you're gonna hit me in the face—" Cloud began, and then suddenly came to the realization that Zack had been flailing because he was trying to roll over to face Cloud.

Cloud was finally still, but his head was spinning anyway. Zack hadn't given him any space, still only inches away, and he watched Cloud with a goofy smile on his face, eyes bright even in the dim light from the streetlamp filtering through Cloud's blinds.

"Whoa," Zack said, and Cloud waited for him to follow it up with something stupid. Your hair looks dumb, or there's something on your face. "Your eyes are so pretty up close."

Cloud froze for just a second, then snorted and shook his head. Of course Zack was kidding. "Yeah, sure. It's dark. You can't even see my eyes."

"Yeah, but I know," Zack argued, reaching up to tap Cloud's nose. "I think about it all the time. Pretty."

"You're drunk," Cloud said, badly stifling laughter.

"You're drunk." Zack leaned closer, clumsily brushing Cloud's hair off his forehead. "At least, I kinda hope you are. If you're not, you might try'n kick my ass for this."

"For wha—"

That was when Zack kissed him.

It was uncoordinated, slightly off-center, and barely lasted three seconds, but Zack kissed him.

There was no way this was real. Cloud was gonna wake up in the morning to find out he'd passed out in the car on the way home and had dreamed the rest of it. Zack hadn't kissed him. Zack wasn't anxiously watching his face for a reaction. Zack wasn't leaning across the gap again and brushing his fingers over Cloud's cheek.

He couldn't be.

Still, the way Zack quietly asked, "...Cloud?" sounded pretty damn real.

If this turned out to be another in his long series of more interesting dreams about Zack, he'd be disappointed in the morning, but for now, he was just going with it. He leaned forward, and while he could have sworn he was shaking, his hand was steady on the back of Zack's neck as he pulled him in again.

Zack's mouth tasted artificially sweet, a remnant of the candy-flavored shots he'd been doing with that guy who kept laying his hand on the small of Zack's back, possessive, like Zack was already his—honestly, Cloud couldn't be blamed for wanting to kiss Zack until he couldn't taste it anymore.

Zack clutched at the back of Cloud's T-shirt, tight enough to wrinkle the fabric. He pressed eagerly closer, and when he opened his mouth, Cloud swore something burned inside him, a shower of sparks like flint being

struck. Zack's skin was warm under his hands as Cloud's palm trailed down his side and grasped his hip. He couldn't remember when Zack had taken off his shirt. It must have been before he climbed into Cloud's bed, right?

Cloud missed the moment when the sparks caught, didn't notice until his entire body was a bonfire and one of Zack's thighs was between his.

Zack slid his hand underneath Cloud's shirt, the brush of his callouses against Cloud's back sending shivers racing along his spine despite the heat. He pulled back, but didn't pause for even a second before moving to kiss Cloud's neck instead, startling a breathy moan out of him. Zack moved slow, savoring, his arm heavy over Cloud's waist, keeping him close.

"Fuck," Cloud sighed, "Zack—"

He didn't conclude whatever nonsense was about to fall out of his mouth, though, because now Zack's lips were barely brushing his skin, and as Cloud stroked over his ribcage, he could feel Zack breathing slow and steady. He was asleep.

"Zack," Cloud said again, to no response, and god, it took way too much effort to shift away from him, so that he wasn't practically riding Zack's thigh anymore. "Hey."

Nothing except for a sleepy sigh.

He really was out cold, and that meant Cloud didn't have it in him to hesitate before brushing his thumb over Zack's lips, trying to commit the feel of them to memory.

— 4 —

A week later, Zack asked, "are you mad at me?" and for a second, Cloud nearly answered in the affirmative.

Listen, it was hard not to be a little pissed when a guy climbed into your bed, made out with you, fell asleep halfway through, and then completely fucking forgot about it in the morning. Either that, or Zack was a much

better liar than Cloud took him for, and had managed to keep up a ruse for the whole damn week.

"No," he said instead, "I'm mad at the goddamn landlord."

He was starting to wish he'd taken Tifa up on moving into the empty unit next door to hers. Sure, her place was a little out of the way of anything except maybe Seventh Heaven, but at least her landlady would've called a damn repairman even in the middle of the night. Mostly because Marle thought Tifa hung the stars in the sky, but hey.

Whoever the fuck owned the enormous apartment building Zack and Cloud lived in, though, couldn't be bothered to do anything before opening of business the next morning. Even if the heat was out and it was November.

"Okay, but how hard could it be to fix—"

"No. I'm not letting you near the heater," Cloud said.

"I'm a professional—"

"This isn't a car! You are definitely not licensed for HVAC," Cloud argued, kicking at him. He wasn't entirely sure whether he'd hit anything, considering Zack was buried underneath three blankets.

"Shit," Zack sighed, "I'm not meant for these temperatures. I'm never gonna be able to sleep."

"Ha. My room's gonna be fine. You told me buying a space heater was stupid."

In Zack's defense, Cloud hadn't used the space heater once until now. "Wait, I forgot you had that thing!" Zack perked up, struggling to both stand and wrap all the blankets around his shoulders at the same time. "I'm sleeping in your room tonight!"

Cloud groaned, wondering if he should maybe just let Zack borrow the damn heater and suffer through the cold by himself. If it wasn't one in the morning, he'd have called somebody and asked to crash on their couch—

Zack actually had tried to do the same, but Angeal went to bed at ten-thirty on a weekend. He'd probably been asleep for hours already.

"Zack, no—"

"What? You're gonna let me freeze?" Zack turned and faced him with those goddamn puppy eyes, and Cloud was helpless to do anything but agree.

Cloud was glad it was a weekend, because laying next to Zack meant he didn't do anything resembling sleep for a long time. He was all too aware of Zack's presence on his left, the two of them too big to share Cloud's bed without touching. It didn't help that Zack usually slept sprawled out in the middle of the bed like a starfish. He moved around too much, occasionally bumping into Cloud as he shifted.

Even when Cloud faced away, he couldn't stop thinking about Zack behind him. He found himself torn between wishing he could kick Zack out of the bed and wishing he'd come closer. He sighed and yanked the blankets all the way up to his ears so that he didn't have to hear Zack's quiet breathing, and it was only then that he managed to drift off.

It was sunny when he woke.

For a second, he thought the heat had come back on. He was pleasantly warm and cozy, and would've drifted right back off if his mind wasn't just aware enough to realize what exactly he was wrapped up in.

Zack had gone to bed in an oversized old hoodie (how a guy that large managed to find something oversized was a mystery), which meant he was extra warm against Cloud. One of his arms was slung over Cloud's waist, curled at the elbow so that his fingertips brushed Cloud's chest. Cloud realized belatedly that his head wasn't on his pillow anymore, Zack's other arm curled up under his head instead. So, not only had Zack cuddled Cloud in his sleep, Cloud had cuddled Zack back.

Zack's chest felt broader than usual when compared to the span of Cloud's back, and that sure made him feel some things. Cloud supposed this might've happened the night they fell asleep together after going out, but by

the time Cloud had gotten up that morning, Zack had long since wandered off into the kitchen to make some coffee and complain to the universe about his hangover.

When Zack shifted, Cloud's heart stopped. He was sure Zack was waking up, and he was struck by how much he truly didn't want to deal with that. He let out a slow breath of relief when instead, Zack just pulled him a little closer, nuzzling against the back of Cloud's neck, one of his legs wedging between Cloud's. He was still fast asleep, but Cloud was more awake than he'd ever been, suddenly and completely aware of Zack's dick against his ass. And, more specifically, the way Zack moving meant he pressed just a little closer...

Alright. Cloud shut off the part of his brain that wanted to grind back into Zack, and also the part that wanted to go right back to sleep, in favor of the part that was developing a carefully planned strategy to escape this with minimal awkwardness.

Step one: Sneak out of bed without waking Zack up.

Step two: Jerk off in the shower.

Step three: Get the goddamn heater fixed.

Cloud shifted slowly, nudging Zack's hand down and trying his best to wiggle out of his grasp. He was nearly free when Zack started uncooperatively stirring, his lips against Cloud's shoulder forming words that Cloud retroactively recognized as, "morning, Sunshine."

Dammit.

Failed step one.

"Where're you headed?" Zack asked, yawning so wide his jaw cracked audibly. His arm tightened around Cloud's middle, either to prevent him from escaping or to hug him.

"I don't know. Away. Your dick is on my ass," Cloud grumbled, resolutely not rolling over to face Zack, because he probably looked adorable and he was close enough that Cloud would be able to see all of him in detail even without his glasses.

"It seems to me," Zack said, burying his face in the crook of Cloud's neck and sighing, "that your ass is on my dick."

"You're the one who cuddles in your sleep."

"Mm."

Cloud wasn't sure if Zack was agreeing with him or just falling asleep again, so he jabbed his elbow backwards until he hit Zack in the ribs. He'd only used about ten percent of his full strength, but Zack gave a wounded cry anyways.

"Go back to sleep," Zack said, "it's barely—" he craned around to look at the clock on the nightstand behind him, "—quarter 'til eight. Even I don't get up this early on weekends, man."

Cloud sat up anyway. Zack's arm was no less of a dead weight, but it fell across his lap instead of over his waist this time. The way Zack looked up at him, barely peeking through sleepy eyes, smiling lazily, was the worst part of it all. Cloud resolutely looked away, resolutely did not think about how he could wake up to that every morning. "Yeah, well, I can't sleep with your —"

"Dick on your ass?" Zack suggested, his smile widening to show his teeth and his dimples. He drew his hand back, pinching Cloud's hip on his way and making Cloud jolt. "Yeah. Do something about it, then."

Do something about it?

"Like... what?" he asked, looking at the curve of Zack's hip under the blankets. His hand was on Cloud's thigh now, gripping a little tighter as Zack sat up.

Zack was clearly awake now, his eyes sharp, focused, on Cloud and nothing else. He leaned in, not close enough that they could be kissing again, but close enough that Cloud wished they were. "Listen, Cloud—"

There was a knock on the door, far too loud for the hour.

"Oh. Guess the HVAC guy's here early," Zack observed. "One minute!" he hollered in the direction of the front door. Cloud's bedroom door was shut, but their walls were tragically thin, so the repairman probably heard him.

"I'll get it," Cloud said, fumbling for his glasses.

Zack snagged his wrist before he could get out the bedroom door, though. "Hey, can we maybe talk about...?"

"I'm probably gonna have to go right after," Cloud said, chewing at a crack in his lower lip. It wasn't entirely true; his mom wasn't expecting him until afternoon. But he'd do anything to delay the inevitable, 'Cloud, I like you, but not like that' conversation.

"Oh, yeah. I forgot," Zack said.

The knocking started back up again, and Cloud looked between the bedroom door and Zack.

"I better get that."

— 5 —

Cloud was supposed to spend the night at his mom's.

He'd been sent home against his will because Claudia Strife was at the top of the list of people who could always guess what Cloud was thinking. They'd been ten minutes into dinner when she asked him what was wrong, and he hadn't even been able to open his mouth before she guessed (correctly) that it had to do with his love life.

The guy, it's kinda awkward, because he's my roommate, he'd explained.

Oh, Cloud. She'd looked oddly disappointed. I really think you could do better—I mean, you said before that he was the most irritating person you'd ever met.

It had taken him a minute to figure out what she was talking about. No, not Reno! Ugh. He moved out last June, I live with Zack now, remember? You met him.

Oh, that's right! I like him.

Of course she did. Everyone's mom liked Zack. Everyone liked Zack, period.

That's why Cloud was headed home late, getting steadily chillier as he sped down the country roads leading out of his tiny hometown, headed back to the city, back to his apartment, back to the capital-C Conversation he had to have with Zack. The roads in Nibelheim were nearly empty, but the Midgar traffic had him trapped soon enough. It was Saturday night, and everyone had somewhere to go. Luckily, he could maneuver around most of it, perks of driving something with two wheels instead of four.

It was nearing eleven when he reached home, kicking his boots off just inside the front door. The apartment was quiet, the living room lights dark. Zack was either in bed already, or he'd gone out to another bar with Aerith. He didn't normally go out two weekends in a row, but Aerith was nothing if not persistent.

The dryer was running, so it was more likely he was home. Zack's bedroom door was open a crack, but when Cloud poked his head in, Zack was nowhere to be found. His bed was bare except for the comforter piled up in a heap in the center, so Cloud guessed Zack's sheets were in the dryer.

With his guesses narrowed down to a late-night pizza run or an impromptu trip to Kunsel's to hang out, Cloud pushed open the door to his own bedroom, batting at the lightswitch until it flicked on.

Turns out, all guesses had been wrong.

Zack was home. He was a room over from where he should've been, curled in the middle of Cloud's bed in almost the same position he'd been in that morning, clutching a pillow instead of spooning Cloud.

He was slowly waking, no surprise. Cloud hadn't exactly been quiet, and the lamp he'd just turned on was right next to Zack's head. "Cloud..?" he asked, rubbing his eyes.

"What... what're you doing?" Cloud still hung in the doorway, like he was waiting to be invited into his own room.

"Sorry, man, I put my sheets in the wash before dinner, and then I forgot about them, and I really didn't wanna wait a whole hour for them to dry, and I didn't think you were coming home—"

"It's fine. Just. It's fine." Cloud finally stepped out of the doorway, shrugging off his jacket and slinging it onto the hook on his wall. He didn't miss the way Zack watched him more than he should've been, and he couldn't tell if that was a good thing or not.

"Why did you come back early?"

Cloud knelt on the bed next to him, and Zack didn't move, just let Cloud get closer. "I had something I needed to do." It wasn't much of an explanation, but Zack didn't seem to need one. He traced his fingertips up Cloud's arm, over his shoulder, settling on his neck.

"Uh-huh. What was that, exactly?" Zack's eyes were searching his face, looking at him with the most apprehension Cloud had ever seen on Zack.

"I need to know if you remember."

Zack's gaze dipped tellingly to Cloud's mouth. "Sort of," he said. "This is about last weekend, right?"

"Yeah. 'Sort of'?"

Zack laughed, tipping forward until his head was pressed against Cloud's shoulder. "C'mon, man, I woke up shirtless in your bed." Cloud could feel

Zack's breath on his collarbone. "Then you started acting completely weird—I can put two and two together, Strife."

"Oh."

Zack lifted his head, something absolutely wicked in the way he looked at Cloud. "Outta curiosity," he began, "how far did we go?"

Cloud rested his forehead against Zack's, mirroring his challenge. "You want a demonstration?"

"Yes. God. Kiss me, please—"

Anything else Zack begged of him was cut off when Cloud bent to his wishes, kissing him a little too hard, his nose bumping into Zack's. He pulled away and the hand Zack had on his neck slid to his jaw, tilting his face just enough to adjust before pulling him in again with his opposite arm around Cloud's shoulders. This time it was softer, lasted longer, and Cloud gripped the strap of Zack's tank top with one hand, his other sinking into Zack's hair.

"Seriously, though," Zack said when they parted, "did we sleep together last time?"

"We've slept together twice," Cloud said, and Zack rolled his eyes, but the smile didn't disappear from his face.

"Don't pretend you don't know what I'm asking." He stole another kiss before asking, "alright, then. Did we fuck?"

"No." Cloud stroked his thumb over Zack's temple, brushing aside the one strand of hair that always seemed to fall into Zack's face.

"Oh, good, thank god."

"You don't need to sound so relieved about it." Cloud tugged on his ear in retaliation.

"Are you kidding me? I'm completely relieved, I'd be kicking myself if drunk me saw you naked and sober me forgot!"

"You absolute dumbass." Cloud snatched up a pillow from the bed and tossed it at Zack's head, muffling his laughter.

When the pillow flopped off his face, Zack was grinning at him brilliantly, teeth flashing white in the low light. He narrowed his eyes and pounced, knocking Cloud back into the blankets and kissing him soundly.

Zack was an overwhelming presence even when he was a few feet away. He was always the loudest person in the room, animated when he did anything, and if you were within his armspan while he was telling a particularly dramatic story, you'd probably get whacked in the face.

He was all the more overwhelming when he was on top of Cloud, mouth and hands everywhere, touching, rubbing, biting. If Cloud wanted him in one place, he'd have to roll him over and pin him down. Huh. That was a thought. Cloud yanked Zack's shirt up, enjoying the way he sucked in a breath when Cloud's cold fingers stroked over his abs. Payback for all those Sundays Zack spent washing his car shirtless in the street right outside their building.

Cloud rested a hand at the small of Zack's back, pulling him closer until he was grinding against Zack like he'd wanted to that morning, frantic and needy. Cloud tucked his fingers in the waistband of Zack's sweats, ready to tug them down when Zack said, "wait."

Cloud's hand dropped away. "You okay?"

"Yeah. But, I mean... shouldn't I take you on at least one date before all this?" Zack asked. Cloud would've laughed in his face if he didn't look so earnest.

"Take me out to breakfast tomorrow morning," he suggested instead. "That work for you, 'O Chivalrous One?"

"I'll have you know," Zack said, sitting up, "I am a gentleman." The way he was pulling his shirt up slow enough for it to be categorized as a strip tease said otherwise.

"Well, quit being a gentleman and take your pants off."

"Alright, fuck, gimme a second." Zack tossed his shirt over his shoulder and it hit Cloud's lamp, which rocked ominously on impact before settling. He paused with his fingers on the drawstring of his sweats, and Cloud would've blamed him for teasing if Zack wasn't very clearly distracted by something about the way Cloud was laying there doing nothing. God only knew what.

Cloud said: "Quit staring."

Zack said: "Can't. You're gorgeous."

Cloud shook his head, fingers twisting in the blankets under his head as he fought the urge to wrap himself up in them to keep Zack from staring at him.

"What?" Zack said, leaning over him. "Don't believe me?"

He was silent, but Zack was starting to get pretty good at reading Cloud's thoughts, too.

"You're always pretty," he said, reaching for Cloud's shirt, thumbing open the top button. "But I should get a picture of you like this, I mean, holy shit." He moved down to the next button, raising an eyebrow at Cloud in question.

Cloud nodded. His flannel was starting to feel way too warm.

"Your eyes are so intense right now," Zack said, "and your mouth gets so red when I kiss you. And your face gets so red when I tell you how stunning you are." He continued unbuttoning Cloud's shirt, leaning over so that he could press his mouth to the slowly-widening V of newly-exposed skin.

When Cloud had been speeding back to Midgar in the cold night air, he'd regretted not wearing an undershirt. He didn't regret it anymore.

Zack continued to trail kisses down Cloud's stomach until Cloud's shirt was unbuttoned and Zack's mouth was at the waistband of his jeans. All the while, he whispered little endearments, sweet nothings that all started to run together as Cloud's brain slowly melted from the heat of Zack's mouth against him through his jeans. His breath was warm and his hands were steady on Cloud's thighs and he wasn't close enough.

"Zack," Cloud sighed, sounding much less irritated than intended.

"Yes?" He ran his fingers over Cloud's cock through his jeans.

"Zack!" Cloud propped himself up on his elbows to properly stare him down. "Stop teasing before I—"

"Before you what?" Zack asked, going right back to teasing. Too much clothes, not enough pressure, maddeningly slow and steady.

Before he decided he'd had enough. Cloud sat up, batting Zack away and shucking off his open shirt and stripping off his jeans. There was no sexy way to take off skinny jeans while sitting on a bed, but Zack looked at him like he'd managed to find one.

"Your clothes are still mysteriously on your body," Cloud observed. "I thought I asked you to take those off."

"I'm not so good at following orders," Zack said. He continued not to, tumbling Cloud back onto the bed instead and kissing his neck. He pressed a kiss to the shell of Cloud's ear, too, before whispering, "let me suck your dick," his breath hot, and Cloud could have told him no, but why?

"Please," he said instead.

He only saw Zack's grin for a second, but it was completely wicked.

Zack was done teasing now. Cloud's underwear was gone before he could blink, and the next thing he saw was Zack between his legs, mouth open, his tongue trailing up the length of Cloud's cock and holy shit, he couldn't

watch that for long. He exhaled a strangled moan, tossing his head back, hiding his face in the crook of his elbow.

Even without the visual stimulation, it was almost too much. Cloud, thanks to the goddamn thin walls, knew academically that Zack was... talented. But knowing was different than feeling, and hearing someone moan from a room away was different than his strangled sigh at the feeling of Zack's mouth on him. He twisted his fingers into the sheets, wishing he had Zack's hands in his instead.

Zack's hand traced up his thigh, then down the back of it, fingertips tickling at the back of Cloud's knee. Cloud used to think Zack was physically incapable of multitasking, but he was perfectly able when both tasks were meant to drive Cloud absolutely wild. He almost kicked Zack in the side, his spine arching, pressing his hips back into the mattress. It was all he could do to keep from thrusting forward into Zack's mouth instead—sure, Zack was enthusiastic, but Cloud still wasn't gonna do that without warning.

And he couldn't warn Zack now, because his brain wasn't keen on the whole 'forming words' thing. His mental process was broken down into a pure stream of pleasure, pushing him straight to the edge, too fast, but whatever, he'd been waiting long enough.

Zack pulled back too soon, and Cloud lifted his head to look, realizing Zack had paused to take his pants off. Because he actually wanted to torture Cloud, probably.

"Zack," he said, didn't whine, "I was so close—"

"I know." Zack's voice was just barely hoarse, and that sure did something to Cloud, but he was still too rueful at being cut off to appreciate it fully. "I wasn't gonna get to see your face."

"Oh," Cloud said, staring up at Zack who was nose-to-nose with him now, straddling him, grinding against him, his brows drawing together and his mouth dropping open in a gasp. "Yeah. This is—" he searched for a word as he studied the shadow of Zack's eyelashes as Zack looked down between the

two of them to fit his hand around Cloud's cock and his own, pulling up in a long, slow stroke.

"This is..." Words continued to desert him.

"Better?" Zack asked, his eyes flicking back up, the brightness of them a shock to Cloud's system.

"Yeah. Much."

Zack's hand continued to move, faster now, his eyes closing despite himself, his forehead leaning against Cloud's. His free hand was just barely brushing through the tips of Cloud's hair, his elbow planted on the mattress above Cloud's right shoulder.

"Zack," Cloud said, fitting his hand to the back of Zack's neck. He got a soft huh? out of Zack and didn't wait for anything more before pulling him into another kiss, sloppier, hungrier than the rest had been. Cloud's other hand traced down Zack's side, grasping at his hip, thumb fitted to the jut of the bone.

When Cloud wasn't so much kissing him as breathing into him, Zack pulled back, his lips just barely brushing Cloud's cheek as he spoke. "Fuck, baby, that's it."

Cloud's eyes were shut but he knew Zack was watching him, and it would've made him itch all over with anxiety if everything wasn't so warm and good and too overwhelming for him to worry about anything that wasn't gripping Zack even tighter and fucking his fist and feeling the way Zack smiled while he watched Cloud come undone.

Cloud was only hazily aware of the next minute or so—Zack sweeping him into another kiss, the stuttering pause and the warmth spilling over his skin as Zack followed him over the edge.

Zack kissed him again after, once he'd snatched some of the tissues out of the box on Cloud's bedside table and cleaned up his hand enough that Cloud wouldn't object to Zack stroking his hair. He smiled as he always did,

shameless and wide, full of dimples and teeth. Cloud's returning grin was, despite it all, a little shy.

"Well," Zack said, breaking the relative silence, "I'm definitely sleeping over tonight."

— +1 —

When Cloud worked second shift, he didn't get home until eleven-thirty, but he usually took a while to wind down, so he'd stay up late into the night. It was part of the reason he wasn't a morning person.

Tonight, he observed the contents of the fridge in the dark kitchen, the white light searing his eyes as he realized that, despite the fact that it was plenty full, he didn't want to eat anything in there. He sighed, closed it, and didn't bother digging through the cabinets as well.

Normally, he'd head straight to his bedroom, maybe with some snacks in tow, and he'd watch something on his laptop or play a game for a while before heading to bed, double-checking his alarm for the next morning.

But Zack's door was open.

Zack's door was almost always open, even when Zack was getting dressed, which drove Cloud to near-insanity even now that he was free to pounce before Zack managed to put clothes on. He was starting to think Zack did that on purpose. It was dark inside, but Zack had probably only gone to bed half an hour or so before Cloud got back. Often, he found Zack still awake when he got home, having lost track of time. Last night, he'd been in the bath. That had been fun.

Zack was, as always, sprawled in the center of his bed, so Cloud could either nudge him out of the way or just lay on top of him.

He chose the latter, stripping out of his pants and his shirt (Zack ran hot, okay? Cloud didn't wear a lot to bed these days) before clambering in, enjoying the startled, sleepy noise Zack made.

They'd always fit together easily. Cloud was the perfect height for Zack to rest an arm on his shoulders and Zack was sturdy enough for Cloud to lean against him. Now, though, it was even more comfortable, because Cloud had discovered that Zack was also a fantastic pillow, and Zack had discovered that hugging Cloud in his sleep was not an instinct that had gone away after the first time.

"Hi," Zack said, his voice slurred with sleep. Cloud wasn't sure if Zack had tried to kiss him on his cheek or his mouth, but he missed either way, getting him somewhere between the corner of his lips and his jawline. "Where'd you come from?"

"Outside," Cloud said, and felt Zack's laugh ruffle his hair.

"Staying here tonight?" Zack asked, and Cloud nodded, pressing his face into Zack's shoulder, his fingers tracing the neckline of Zack's T-shirt. "Good," Zack said, "my class tomorrow morning is cancelled."

"That's nice." It meant Cloud would wake up to Zack still in bed—or rather, he'd wake up to Zack having gotten back into bed after he did his usual ridiculous morning shit.

"You know," Zack said, his thumb rubbing at the back of Cloud's neck, "tomorrow's gonna be our first-month anniversary."

"That's not an anniversary."

"Yes it is!" Zack was now fully awake and indignant. "And here I was gonna think of something fun to do to celebrate."

"I'm just saying. Anniversary implies that it's a year." Cloud stuck his hand up the back of Zack's shirt. Zack, who hadn't gotten used to how cold Cloud's hands always were, shivered. "We can still do your thing, though."

"You don't even know what it is."

Cloud couldn't see Zack, but he was pretty sure he was grinning. "It's got a chance of being a good idea. You have those sometimes."

"I have good ideas always."

"That's just blatantly untrue," Cloud argued. Zack had found an old skateboard last week and had convinced Wedge to tow him on a rope behind his car. He'd made it a whole block, and still had the bruises to prove that he did not have good ideas always. Cloud yawned and trapped one of Zack's legs between his. "What's your idea?"

"It's a surprise." Either he truthfully didn't want to tell Cloud, or he was falling asleep.

"I don't do surprises."

"You'll like it." Zack's breathing slowed and steadied as he drifted off.

"Hm." Somehow, he thought he probably would.

Author's Note:

Thanks to everyone in the clack discord who helped me brainstorm and determine what my 5 things were going to be, without y'all it would have been like.... 3.5 times + 1